

White Paper

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University of Iowa Next Generation PhD Planning Grant White Paper
The Newly Composed PhD: Writing Across Careers

<http://nextgenphd.lib.uiowa.edu/>

Project Director: Judith Pascoe, Professor of English and Senior Scholar
for the Digital Arts and Humanities

What happened?

The University of Iowa's planning process was concentrated in five humanities departments—English, Rhetoric, Classics, History, and the Division of World Languages—departments that were selected because they have a writing focus and because they were open to, or already immersed in, the application of digital research approaches. The planning group's overall goals included:

- 1) Enabling graduate students to integrate discipline-specific work, digital humanities literacy, and flexible career preparation from the first year of graduate school
- 2) Stimulating collaboration among UI programs, departments, and schools
- 3) Helping students develop rhetorical skills that would enable them to write for varied audiences
- 4) Connecting students to allies and career consultants who could help them match their PhD skill sets to varied jobs

The principal activities were a series of symposia organized around rhetorical forms: the dissertation, the footnote, the tweet, the blog, the CV or resume, and the elevator pitch. For our symposia presentations we used a “flipped lecture” format aimed at fostering broad-ranging discussions. Committee members compiled in advance a series of questions that encouraged the guests to address topics that advanced the goals of the grant, and audience members were encouraged to join in the conversations.

We began the grant year with two guests, Amanda Visconti and Nick Sousanis, whose innovative dissertations helped us to imagine new forms the dissertation might take, to identify what tasks a humanities dissertation should accomplish, and to ask whether these tasks could be accomplished through the creation of something other than a 250-page narrative. Amanda Visconti's dissertation, *InfiniteUlysses*, is a fully DH dissertation encompassing design, coding, blogging, user testing, and statistical analysis. Nick Sousanis's dissertation, *Unflattening*, is entirely written and drawn in comics form.

In advance of Visconti's and Sousanis's visits, which took place early in the fall semester, we held three sessions of a book discussion group so that nearly all of the members of our planning committee (please see Appendix for a list of major participants) would be able to join in a discussion of an excerpt from Sidonie Smith's *Manifesto for the Humanities* and of Alexandria Agloro, Johanna Taylor, and Elyse Gordon's survey of innovative

dissertations in “What’s the Point: The Dissertation as Process and Not Product.” A small interdisciplinary group of planning committee members also met to anatomize the crucial components of the traditional dissertation, coming up with two tasks that a humanities dissertation must accomplish:

- 1) Present a new argument or intervention in a field.
- 2) Showcase the author’s fluency in the extant scholarship.

The early planning group discussions served as a foundation for the Visconti and Sousanis symposium events, at which we contrasted their innovative practices against our agreed-upon disciplinary standards.

Focusing on shorter forms of scholarly communication, two subsequent symposia featured public intellectuals who have become adept at tweeting and blogging. With Ivan Kreilkamp, an expert on Victorian fiction and a Twitter aficionado, we pondered such questions as: What is the life and scholarly future of the tweet? We looked at the salutary aspect of Twitter—Twitter as a venue for building community—and also at its darker side—Twitter as time suck and distraction.

Our blogging symposium featured UI Classics Professor Sarah Bond, who blogs on ancient history for *Forbes*, and Rebecca Schuman, a German PhD and free-lance writer, who contributes to *Slate* and *The Awl*. Schuman chronicled her investment in German language study and her dispiriting job search in a trade press book called *Schadenfreude, a Love Story*. With Bond and Schuman, we discussed (among other topics) how blogging impacted their traditional scholarly writing, and how they modify their prose styles as they write for different audiences.

Two subsequent symposia focused on preparing PhD students for careers within and outside the academy by looking at differences in professional self-presentation in those different realms. We brought together judges and participants in the 3-Minute Thesis Contest (3-MT) and the Elevator Pitch competition, with Professor David Hensley, director of the Papajohn Entrepreneurial Center, contributing a business perspective, and 3-MT winner and Iowa English PhD Ben Miele explaining how this exercise prepared him for the job market.

In a symposium focusing on the CV and resume and on career preparation more generally, our guests were Danielle Dutton and Eric Zimmer. After receiving her PhD, Dutton worked as a book designer at the Dalkey Archive and founded the Dorothy Project (a small press). Eric Zimmer (a 2016 Iowa History PhD), is a Senior Historian at Vantage Point Historical Services, Inc. With Dutton and Zimmer we discussed how students might be encouraged from the beginning of their graduate school education to craft varied forms of self-representation in order to be prepared for a broader range of professional opportunities.

Our final symposium attempted to imagine a cross-disciplinary methods class that would provide graduate students with the skills sets our planning process sought to cultivate.

Discussion participants included English professor Judith Pascoe, who taught a Next Gen pilot methods class, which included workshops on data, text analysis, and mapping; History professor Matthew Noellert, who taught a digital research methods class; and Religion professor Kristy Nabhan-Warren, who taught an interdisciplinary graduate writing seminar. Participants, including the graduate students enrolled in these three classes, discussed how facets of these classes (such as Pascoe's resume assignment, which asked students to identify a desirable job outside academe, and transform their CV into a resume suitable for that position) might be deployed by other instructors. We also considered ways in which a modular approach to graduate student education might be deployed. For example, faculty with strengths in teaching particular skill sets could volunteer to teach units of classes in other departments in exchange for being able to draw on the talents of other teachers. For example, a mapping expert in Classics could contribute her expertise to a History seminar, and, in turn, count on a History professor to contribute a unit on archival research.

What worked and what didn't?

We ran a democratic and inclusive planning process with all planning meetings and Next Gen symposia open to everyone, and with all events advertised on our web site (<http://nextgenphd.lib.uiowa.edu/>), which we set up within weeks of receiving the grant. (We also advertised symposia on the University events calendar and by means of paper posters.) We used the web site to post about our preparation for events, to share our follow-up considerations of the symposium conversations, and to showcase innovative work by current graduate students and by humanities PhD alumni.

We innovated a "flipped lecture" format which enabled our symposia to transcend the usual guest lecturer routine, with its expectation that the guest will perform and that the audience will remain passive until the Q and A period. A subset of our overall committee prepared for each symposium by identifying the topics with which we wanted our guest to engage, and by coming up with lists of questions which we posted on our web site in advance of the events (and which we conveyed to our guest speakers). At each symposium, the project director Judith Pascoe gave a 7-minute overview of the guest's work and experience, focusing on those parts which were most directly relevant to our aims and goals. For example, we telegraphed in advance that we wanted to ask Amanda Visconti, creator of a DH dissertation, the following questions:

What was exceptional about your experience as a graduate student? What could or could not be translated for a different institution?

What was the relationship between your comprehensive exam and your innovative dissertation?

To Ivan Kreilkamp, our social media consultant, we asked:

Are there aspects of voice curation on Twitter that you think are especially important for graduate students?

How, or to what extent, is it possible to use Twitter to advance a research program?

To Danielle Dutton and Eric Zimmer, participants in our CV/resume symposium, we posed these questions (among others):

What led you to pursue particular career opportunities (and perhaps not others) after receiving the PhD?

How have you framed yourselves for different employers? What kinds of advice do you give your current students or colleagues about this task of framing?

If you could redo your graduate education, what would you change? What changes to grad training might be suggested by your experiences?

We count among our positive outcomes:

Opening of discussions about career possibilities to include a broader range of options

Increased attention to practice in different forms of writing and for a broader range of audiences

The development of enhanced alliances and networks, especially between the Graduate College, which hosts a broad array of career preparation events and services, and humanities departments

The promotion of internal and external success stories, the showcasing (by means of our web site and the symposia) of PhD candidates engaged in innovative dissertation projects, and of PhD alums who are working outside the academy

A strong web and Twitter presence, which enabled those who could not attend all of our events to stay involved in our discussions, and which will allow our work to live beyond the duration of the planning year

The exchange of ideas for course development and for sharing course units across humanities departments

Collaboration between the Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio and the Graduate College so as to develop summer fellowships aimed at giving graduate students opportunities to develop technical skills early in their graduate careers; first 9 beneficiaries active in the summer of 2017

Development of four (summer 2017) graduate student summer internships aimed at encouraging grad student work related to the three main goals of the grant (DH skills, writing skills, expanded career planning and preparation)

Broad institutional support; program directors, deans, department chairs, lecturers, librarians, and graduate students contributing to the success of the planning process

The challenges we confronted included integrating our discoveries into the working operations of departments so that Next Gen PhD insights can become part of departmental DNA. By the end of the planning year, we were successful in initiating and sustaining a broad-ranging conversation about graduate education and about changes in PhD career expectations. Each of our symposia was attended by an audience composed of students, faculty, and staff from across the university; the number of participants for each event numbered from 35 to 75. We recognize that we still have work to do in seeing that the best practices we identified in our planning sessions, in our public events, and in our post-event web site postings are broadly and securely implemented.

How best to create structures of support for future graduate students is a topic of ongoing debate, with some planning committee members articulating a need to enhance faculty development, and others in favor of a more student-centered approach. It is unreasonable to expect senior faculty, who direct the majority of dissertations, to become expert at new DH approaches to research, but we all believe that these faculty can serve in key supportive roles as their students experiment with new digital research platforms. We hope to find more ways to get department chairs and directors of graduate studies fully engaged with some of the transformative strategies that we've identified through our planning year, and to help them draw attention to their successful innovators. We also hope to increase outreach to alumni and potential employers so that our graduate students have more exposure to hiring networks outside of academe and to a wide range of alumni role models.

Throughout the year, we confronted some skepticism from colleagues who are concerned that disciplinary standards will become watered down if students' energies are diverted from traditional scholarly pursuits. In some departments, faculty expressed the view that their graduate students were doing well on the academic job market, and that this would not be the case if their training was altered to reflect some of the Next Gen objectives. (It is important to note that the faculty view of placement success in these department was rosier than that of graduate students.) We conceded that such concerns are legitimate, and that the preparation of graduate students for a broad range of careers should not require sacrificing scholarly rigor or jettisoning long form narrative.

We recognize the difficulty of bringing about curricular change, particularly at an extra-departmental level and with interdisciplinary cooperation, and we identified ways in which curricular enhancement could take place by providing faculty with models of successful teaching units or by means of a trade system in which faculty could draw on others' areas of expertise.

Our planning process highlighted the excellent career service programs provided by the University of Iowa Graduate College, with Jen Teitle, Assistant Dean in the Office of Graduate Student Success, playing an active role in our planning meetings and symposia

(as well as contributing two blog posts to our web site). We discovered that humanities PhD students on campus make less use of these services and programs than do graduate students in the sciences. We hope to bring about more interactions between dissertation directors in the humanities and the professional staff in the Graduate College.

What does it all mean?

Throughout our planning process, we've compiled a Next Gen manifesto, a list of practices that guests have shared or have repeatedly recommended, and that we have come to embrace:

Openness—the sharing of research process as a means of building an audience for one's work and a community of colleagues beyond one's immediate circle

Assertiveness—the tailoring of graduate student experiences to meet individual intellectual and professional objectives

Faculty flexibility—a willingness to follow students in new directions, and to be open to new mentoring strategies

Early and enthusiastic discussions of multiple career options—a tonal shift in how faculty talk to students about careers beyond the academy so as to erase any stigma associated with non-traditional career paths

If there is one unifying thread that runs through all of these practices, it is an emphasis on graduate students becoming active shapers, rather than passive recipients, of their own educations. As many have noted, our students are venturing out into a world in which the jobs they take on in the future may not yet have been invented. In order to prepare for a broader range of career options, there needs to be an emphasis on skill sets as well as on disciplinary content.

A strength of our planning process was the involvement of a number of participants who have recent experience with the job application process, and who have come to use their PhD training in a wide variety of ways. To a person, these participants emphasized the value of their graduate training even though they did not necessarily use their training in the way they initially expected. These participants were especially compelling testifiers to the need for individual initiative and flexible training. For example, at our CV/resume symposium the Dorothy Project publisher Danielle Dutton and the corporate historian Eric Zimmer both offered a counter-narrative to the advice graduate students often receive. Well-intentioned faculty members frequently tell graduate students that they need to preserve their energies for dissertation- and article-writing. Students are often warned to avoid time-consuming “distractions” from these central endeavors. But both Dutton and Zimmer took on demanding extra tasks (Dutton as an assistant editor for a journal, Zimmer as a public historian), tasks that were not directly related to these main endeavors, but which led to their ultimate careers.

It has also become clear over the past year that, as Classics professor Sarah Bond wrote, “Visualizing the reformation of PhD training as a means of galvanizing, strengthening, and ultimately enhancing the degree is integral to removing the stigma currently attached to the word ‘alt-ac.’” We have found that there is a disconnect between the encouragement that faculty think they are providing to students who are interested in embarking on careers beyond the academy, and the messages that the students are hearing. Many students told of orientation meetings at which faculty referred to the narrowing academic job market, and suggested that students look toward jobs elsewhere as a kind of lesser alternative option. In the Next Gen pilot seminar, Judith Pascoe asked students to imagine (and track down job listings for) jobs they could imagine themselves enjoying, and she confessed to a longstanding interest in working in a theatre setting. The framing of the exercise was crucial—students need to see a broad range of career opportunities legitimized by hearing their teachers and mentors talk about these options as interesting and desirable opportunities, rather than as fallback positions.

Our planning process reinforced the belief, written into our grant application, that graduate education needs to integrate writing skills *and* technical skills, traditional disciplinary training *and* skills-based training, all of which can serve as credentialing for a range of careers. By focusing our symposia on short- and long-form varieties of scholarly communication, many of which are also at the forefront of non-scholarly social media campaigns, we were able to help students and faculty see how greater attention to audience and rhetorical situation will serve students well in varied professional settings. Many of our planning committee participants are humanities PhDs who hold academic jobs, but not tenure-track teaching positions. They sought to underscore the importance of developing a rhetorical flexibility that has not been emphasized in traditional graduate training. In our symposium focusing on the blog, which featured a free-lance writer and a Classics professor, both guest participants described how they cultivate audiences for their work, develop relationships with editors, and fine-tune their writing to suit particular rhetorical situations. Professor Sarah Bond wrote in a Next Gen blog posting about how enhanced technical skills, too, will serve PhDs both within and beyond the academy, saying, “Graduate students should be encouraged to think about the benefits to their research, their teaching, and their writing that comes from acquiring digital skills such as GIS or network analysis. Understanding of these methods can diversify their portfolio in terms of employment abilities, no doubt, but they are also a way of elevating their teaching approaches and ability to communicate an argument effectively.”

The Next Gen planning group has come to see the value of considering alternative academic models, especially ones practiced within the sciences. One member of our planning committee, a Professor of Chemistry, described how graduate students in her department routinely spend their first year of grad school making the rounds of lab groups. We talked about ways in which this practice might be emulated in the humanities, so that PhD students could move in orbits larger than those of their dissertation groups, and so that all faculty would be familiar with, and have a stake in the success of, all students in their departments (and also those in other departments). New structures of support, guidance, and mentorship will play key roles in cultivating the more self-directed graduate students of the future.

What's next?

By the end of this semester, having carried out everything we proposed in our grant proposal, we are planning how faculty, students, and staff can work together to continue advocating for enhanced DH/writing skills, and for innovative graduate training in the humanities that will prepare students for a variety of career paths. The University of Iowa plans to submit an application for an implementation grant, and several core members of the planning committee have committed themselves to forming an implementation group. They include Russell Ganim, Director of the Division of World Languages; Matt Gilchrist, Rhetoric Lecturer and Director of IDEAL (Iowa Digital Engagement and Learning); Stephanie Blalock, Digital Humanities Librarian; and David Gooblar, Rhetoric Lecturer and “Pedagogy Unbound” columnist for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

The group plans to reach out to graduate councils in each academic department in order to encourage participation, not only through fliers and posted information, but especially through word of mouth. As Professor Russ Ganim suggests, “This has the effect of making the Next Gen events more socially acceptable, known, and interacted with on an interpersonal level. Within these events, graduate students should then be encouraged to think about the benefits to their research, their teaching, and their writing that comes from acquiring digital skills such as GIS or network analysis.” The group also plans to increase its efforts to involve alumni and community members. Classics professor Sarah Bond adds, “Encouraging the involvement of alumni, professionals, and non-faculty in the process of reforming and recasting the PhD is pivotal to its success. Involving individuals with experience within positions beyond the walls of the university setting (e.g. in public radio or at local museums) is a key way of illustrating the application of digital humanities skillsets outside of faculty positions. It is also a means for creating networks on a local, regional, and national level that can be of service to our students.”

As part of plans for further implementation of the Next Gen objectives, we have begun to conceptualize the development of a Next Gen PhD fellows program that would allow incoming graduate students across disciplines to cultivate the integrated skill set we explored in our planning process, a skill set aimed at enriching PhD career preparation through the cultivation of enhanced rhetorical and technical proficiencies. We can imagine such a program being based in the Rhetoric Department, home of the IDEAL (Iowa Digital Engagement and Learning) program, which supports multi-modal teaching assignments, and serves as a nerve center for people interested in writing for different venues and for communicating by means of varied media.

A Next Gen fellows program might allow a coterie of students to take a suite of classes related to their writing, to collaborate on projects with staff members in the Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio, and to cultivate multi-modal teaching strategies with the IDEAL program. Instead of having their financial support tied to teaching, as it is for most University of Iowa humanities graduate students, who typically maintain demanding teaching schedules across the entire period of their graduate training, Next Gen fellows could choose sites for a fellowship semester, placements that would meet

their future career objectives. For example, a student might have a chance to shadow PhDs who have non-tenure track positions on campus (such as in the advising office or in the Graduate College) or to interact with PhDs who work beyond the academy.

We plan to continue to encourage the development of Next Generation dissertations, and to find ways to give students contact with a broader range of faculty and staff. We hope to explore the creation of mentoring structures modeled after those found in science departments, where first-year students often make the rounds of labs, so that first-year humanities students could gain experience with varied humanities researchers across disciplines

We note that several courses that might support Next Gen fellows already exist on campus, for example a graduate class focusing on science communication in a digital age, courses assembled to meet the requirements of the Public Digital Humanities Certificate, and writing-focused methods classes in several PhD programs. We seek to explore how students could be encouraged to take better advantage of writing, DH, and career-oriented resources already available on campus, by organizing them into a coherent portfolio of courses and work experiences. We are also exploring the possibility of creating a humanities career development course through which students would receive course credit by attending a certain number of on-campus programs that share the objectives of our Next Gen planning and implementation process.

Our tentative implementation plans are inspired by the success we had with graduate students who were written into our planning grant and who received honorarium in recognition of their efforts. These students, the most active and committed participants in the symposia and related events, have become thought leaders in their departments, and provide our most convincing evidence of the value of the successful strategies identified by the planning process. University of Iowa administrators who are supportive of ongoing Next Gen PhD plan implementation span many programs and offices, including the Office of Research and Economic Development, the Graduate College, and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Working with the Office of Research and Economic Development and the University of Iowa Foundation, we feel confident we will be able to secure the required matching funds for a Next Gen Implementation Grant application.

Appendix: Primary participants

Judith Pascoe, Professor, Department of English; Senior Scholar, Digital Arts and Humanities Research, University of Iowa

Russell Ganim, Director of Division of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures; Co-Chair of the Humanities Advisory Board, University of Iowa

Jennifer Teitle, Assistant Dean for Graduate Development and Postdoctoral Affairs, Graduate College, University of Iowa

Mary Wise, PhD candidate, Department of History, University of Iowa, History Corps member, HASTAC Scholar (2015-2016)

Matthew Gilchrist, Iowa Digital Engagement and Learning (IDEAL) Director; Lecturer, Department of Rhetoric, University of Iowa

Amy Chen, Special Collections Instruction Librarian, University of Iowa; works with Obermann Center staff to publish a newsletter on Alt-Ac careers

David H. Hensley, Clinical Professor and Executive Director, John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center, Tippie College of Business, University of Iowa

Elizabeth Heineman, Chair, Department of History, University of Iowa

Daniel A. Reed, Vice President for Research and Economic Development, University Computational Science and Bioinformatics Chair, University of Iowa

Stephanie Blalock, Digital Humanities Librarian, Associate Editor of Walt Whitman Archive, Alumna of the University of Iowa, where she received her PhD in English and her MA in Library Science

Sarah Larsen, Professor, Department of Chemistry, Associate Dean, Graduate College, University of Iowa

Jennifer Shook, PhD, Department of English, Digital Bridges Post-Doc (Grinnell College), Co-Director of Imagining America's PAGE (Publicly Active Graduate Engagement) Fellow Program, 2012 Obermann Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy Fellow

Samuel Fitzpatrick, PhD Candidate, Department of English, University of Iowa

Steve Duck, Chair, Department of Rhetoric; Daniel and Amy Starch Distinguished Research Chair, Department of Communication Studies, University of Iowa

Michaela Hoenicke Moore, Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Department of History, University of Iowa

Thomas Keegan, Director, Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio, University of Iowa

Adam Hooks, Assistant Professor and Graduate Placement Coordinator, Department of English, University of Iowa

Sarah Bond, Assistant Professor, Department of Classics, University of Iowa; Co-PI on BAM: Big Ancient Mediterranean, open-access project that enables the visualization of ancient texts

Matthew Brown, Associate Professor, Department of English and UI Center for the Book

Dave Gooblar, Lecturer, Department of Rhetoric, University of Iowa; Columnist at Chronicle Vitae, *Chronicle of Higher Education*

Jonathan Wilcox, Chair and John C. Gerber Professor of English, University of Iowa

Ann Ricketts, Assistant Vice President for Research, Office of Research and Economic Development, University of Iowa

Kenneth G. Brown, Associate Dean, Tippie College of Business, University of Iowa; Research specialization: management and leadership development

Teresa Mangum, Professor, Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies; Director, Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, University of Iowa

Kristy Nabhan-Warren, Associate Professor, Department of Religion; Co-Chair, Humanities Advisory Board, University of Iowa

Marc Armstrong, Collegiate Fellow and Associate Dean for Research and Infrastructure, and the Social Sciences, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Iowa

Christine Getz, Associate Dean for Graduate Education and the Arts, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Iowa

John Keller, Dean of the Graduate College, Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Education, University of Iowa

Katie Walden, PhD Candidate, American Studies, University of Iowa

Sarah Hales, PhD Candidate, Department of Classics, University of Iowa